

When I was in the seminary I got a summer job at Midland Tru-Value Hardware, where we sold, among other things, paint. Let me be the first to tell you I knew nothing about hardware when I got hired there, and I learned practically nothing more. The owner was a member of the Serra Club who hired me because I was a seminarian. I was one of his stupidest employees ever. One day I looked over cans of spray paint arranged by color on three shelves at the end of one aisle. Each can carried an order number. On my own initiative I rearranged the paint according to its number, unaware that a more effective way to sell paint is by color. I showed my boss what I had done, and the next day he had someone else rearrange the paint the way it was before. If you're going to work in a paint shop, you'd better know how to sell paint.

Fifty years ago St. John Francis Regis Parish opened for business inside a paint shop. Since that time a series of priests walked in here and rearranged the cans. Sometimes we made things better; sometimes we didn't. But the parish has continued on in spite of us. We priests aren't the only ones who have come and gone. Many of you have too. Some original members of the paint shop cathedral are still with us. God bless you for your faithfulness to this community. Others have moved on. Some families first moved to this neighborhood because of its opportunities and conveniences; others came here to abandon their previous neighborhood out of prejudice and fear. Fifty years later the population still shifts for similar reasons. If ever there was a time in American history when a Catholic community needed to bring the light of the gospel to the city, it's now. If ever there's a place where ethnic diversity can strengthen a community, it's here. If ever there's a people who can make a difference in the world, it's you.

St. Regis has always enjoyed a reputation for doing things a bit differently. Its rectory was the first to give the priest a home away from his workplace. A Catholic high school next door to a Catholic grade school attracted interest throughout the city. Lay leadership in councils breathed life and commitment here. The design of the new church prompted Bishop Boland to say, "A diocese should have churches representing various architectural models. St. Regis has contributed to that." Brother William Woeger, who advised us on the design, is now helping the Diocese of Orange, California, repurpose the Protestant Crystal Cathedral as the Catholic Christ Cathedral. Go on line and look at the plans. The altar will be in the middle with seating on opposite sides. One of our country's best-known church buildings is going to look like a larger version of St. Regis.

If you're like me, you moved here thinking you could do something, and this community convinced you to do something better. Jesus tells of a man with two sons. Both of them say one thing and do something else, but only one of them has a change of heart. God invites us to change for the better, to change even some of our most hardwired opinions. Rearranging the paint shop is not always the best plan. But letting the paint shop rearrange you is. Our love for this parish, its people, and the God we share emboldens us to consider other ideas. Looking down from heaven upon this holy place with its vibrant colors on display, God must be very proud. St. Regis, today you are painted one color: gold. Congratulations on 50 years of giving service to the church and praise to God.